



The Netherlands to Give a Face to 10,000 Killed U.S. WWII Soldiers Buried in Margraten

Thousands of white marble crosses and Stars of David, row after row. This is what one sees when overlooking the American War Cemetery in the town of Margraten, the Netherlands. The markers are testimony to the sacrifices made by many young American men and women for the freedom of Europe during World War II. Through *The Faces of Margraten* tribute in May of this year the Dutch will pay special tribute to these soldiers by decorating their more than 10,000 graves and names on the Walls of the Missing with personal photos of the soldiers. The project has started a quest to locate more soldiers' photos.

During the first edition of the tribute in 2015, a personal photo was available for about a third of the 10,023 American soldiers buried in or memorialized at the cemetery. 25,000 grateful Dutch citizens came out to visit the tribute and to pay their respect to those who made the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom of the Netherlands and other European countries. "The number of people that came out showed that people widely continue to recognize the importance of remembering those to whom we owe our freedom, even 70 years after the end of World War II. Moreover, the visitors' responses revealed that people were touched by the fact that they could look straight into the eyes of our liberators," says Sebastiaan Vonk, chairman of the Foundation United Adopters American War Graves, which organizes *The Faces of Margraten* tribute.

However, thousands of photos are still missing. "Maybe you're related to one of the soldiers, and have a photo tucked away in an album you haven't looked through in years. Please look again, and if you find one, help us honor the sacrifices of thousands of other Americans by contributing the photo to *The Faces of Margraten*," said Vonk. "Each photo matters, even if the quality is not great, because it means another soldier who will be honored," Vonk added.

Photos can be submitted through the project's website, www.TheFacesOfMargraten.com. All submitted photos as well as other information on these soldiers can already be found in the foundation's [Fields of Honor - Database](#). The photos will be placed next to the headstones from May 1-5, when the Netherlands observes the 71st anniversary of its liberation.

"If you look at all the photos, you will see many young men and women, sometimes with their parents, with their brothers and sisters, their friends, sometimes with their own children. Looking at these photos makes you realize that they were not just soldiers; they were young individuals like us with a family, friends, interests, and dreams. We could have been them had we lived in a different time and place," Vonk remarks.

Adopting graves

Since 1945, Dutch locals have adopted the graves of the soldiers buried in Margraten. Out of heartfelt respect and gratitude, the graves' adopters regularly visit the graves and decorate them with flowers. Many of the graves' adopters also continue to correspond with the families of soldiers back home in the United States. The care for the graves of their loved ones has been a comfort to many of these families and the foundation of long-lasting friendships between Dutch and American families.

Seventy-one years after the war, younger generations have taken up the responsibility to remember these soldiers. "When I speak to people they sometimes say that the youth no longer cares about the past and those who fought for their freedom. I do not believe that. Many young Dutch people show an interest in the war and continue to visit these cemeteries, and many, like me, have adopted a grave and are volunteers for *The Faces of Margraten* tribute. We will continue to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice for many years to come," Vonk, 23 himself, concludes.

More information about the project can be found at www.thefacesofmargraten.com. More information on the foundation can be found at www.svaao.nl. For press inquiries, please contact: info@degezichtenvanmargraten.nl.